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The Spirit of Power, Love, and Self-control

2 Timothy 1: 6-7

When we consider what God has called us to do, it's reasonable to conclude, "I can't do this!" Reasonable, but not completely accurate. We can't do it but God wants to work with us and through us by His Holy Spirit. *2 Timothy 1:6-7* is one of many passages in Paul's letters which assert how dependent on the Holy Spirit he was. When we don't have the Holy Spirit working in us, we become fearful, and we lack power, love, and self-control.

The Holy Spirit is God Himself, in a form we cannot see (unlike Jesus' flesh and blood), who is able to meet with many people at many times and places. He's the presence and the power of God with us, in every Christian, right now. God has always wanted us to be with Himself: that's why He made the Earth, for us to live with Him, that's why Jesus came to make a way back to God for us after we separated ourselves from Him, that's why He will return to be with us forever. That's why God has sent the Holy Spirit to live in us now – a taste of what is to come and the grace we need to live for Him today.

The Holy Spirit also fills us afresh with Himself to do the impossible. The gospels are clear that everything Jesus did, He did in the power of the Holy Spirit (*Luke 4:18, John 1:33*), which means we can follow Him and do the things He did (*John 20:21-22*). The first Christians believed that the Holy Spirit was God's gift for all who believe in Jesus (*Acts 2:38-39, Ephesians 5:18*). God is pleased to give us His Spirit. He is not a reward

for good behaviour: no army commander says to their troops: 'Go out and fight, and if you do a really good job, next time I'll give you guns to use.'

1. Power

God is mighty, and He wants to work mightily in you and through you. The Bible is full of stories of this happening.

The word for power is used 120 times in the New Testament, describing the amazing things that Jesus did, and that His first followers did, and their encouragement to everyone else who followed after them do the same (*Acts 1:8, 1 Corinthians 2:3-4, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, Ephesians 3:14-19*). We can ask that God will give us power by His Holy Spirit for ourselves, to strengthen us where we feel weak and confirm His truth in us. And we can ask for gifts like healing and prophecy that will do others good and demonstrate the power of God to the rest of the world.

You may feel very conscious of God's power when you receive it – as strong as an electric shock or as subtle as the changing of the wind's direction – or you might only see its effects in the people God blesses through you.

2. Love

You can have all the power in the world, but if you don't have love it won't count for anything. *1 Corinthians 13* was written in the middle of a discussion of spiritual gifts (*1 Corinthians 12 and 14*).

"Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so" is profoundly true – and the Holy Spirit asserts this truth in us (*Romans 5:5, 8:15-16*). We experience God's love, it isn't simply a fact that we are aware of.

His love is poured out into us, and flows from us, which is maybe why it's the first item on Paul's list of what the Spirit grows in us in Galatians 5. Jesus said that the defining characteristic of His people was to be their love for each other (*John 13:35*).

3. Self-control

Vibrant life can cause problems, as parents of toddlers are willing to testify. There's no problem with self-control in a graveyard: everyone stays exactly where they've been put. Churches full of the Holy Spirit's power and love are wonderful places, and they need care

Self-control might sound like something that's down to us, in a way that miraculous healings clearly can't be but Paul says that we're missing out on God's gracious supply of Himself if we trust only in ourselves. He often uses the word "flesh" to mean either doing things in our own strength or in the human default mode of opposition to God, and he contrasts this "fleshly" living with the power of the Spirit to change us (*Romans 8:13, Galatians 3:3, Galatians 5:16*). The Spirit doesn't take over our will but works with us so that we can learn how to make the right decisions and actually carry them out. He prompts us and frees us to do this. Like the other gifts of power and love we've thought about, the Holy Spirit can work instantly or patiently in us.

Knowing the challenges you face, and your weaknesses, don't you want God to be with you - actively, powerfully with you? Then ask Him (*John 7:37, Luke 11:13*)! How He chooses to answer is up to Him, but how often we ask is up to us.

Questions

- These notes are full of Bible references, go through them and choose a few of particular interest or challenge to you and your group. Talk together about what God is offering to us through them, what experiences you've had of what they describe, and invite people to say which ones they particularly feel their own need of.
- If anyone in the group is unsure about God's willingness to fill us with His Holy Spirit today, spend some time looking at the references to this so that there is faith among you, an expectation that He will do so.
- Worship God together and invite the Holy Spirit to make Himself known to you, that He would fill you with His power, love, and self-control. Encourage people to share what the Spirit is saying and doing to them, pray for each other to receive spiritual gifts and other blessings from God.



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